

Des ouvriers licenciés régénèrent la résistance et transcendent le lieu de travail: l'étude de cas d'ex-métallurgistes près de Johannesburg

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Résumé

Cet article souhaite contribuer à notre compréhension de l'organisation adoptée par des ouvriers licenciés dans un contexte de réorganisation du travail. Il examine pour ce faire un groupe d'ouvriers licenciés d'une aciérie, à 70 km au sud de Johannesburg, qui ont su « régénérer » une résistance qui va au-delà du lieu de travail et de l'emploi permanent. Insatisfaits de leur syndicat (NUMSA), ces travailleurs, une fois licenciés, ont formé le Working Class Co-ordinating Committee (WCCC) en 1998. Aujourd'hui, plus d'une quinzaine d'années plus tard, l'organisme continue d'être soutenu par des ouvriers licenciés à la suite de compressions, qui logent au Kwa-Masiza Hostel.

La fondation de cet organisme d'ouvriers victimes de compressions est liée à l'incapacité de la NUMSA à unir toutes les factions divisant ses membres durant une période de réorganisation de la main d'œuvre à grande échelle, générée par une intense compétitivité mondiale. Les désaccords sur la façon de réagir à ces bouleversements ne se sont pas limités à des polémiques entre les différentes factions, mais ont entraîné des pertes de vies et ont affaibli la position du syndicat sur le marché du travail. Le présent article délaisse l'approche traditionnelle qui tend à explorer les dynamiques ouvrières en milieu de travail sous la bannière des syndicats, et souligne la résistance continue des ouvriers licenciés dans un contexte subséquent à celui du lieu de travail. Les leçons, les méthodes et les rituels fonctionnels appris en milieu de travail sont récupérés dans une nouvelle forme d'organisme pour ces ouvriers victimes de compressions, en dehors des sphères politique et géographique du lieu de travail.

Retrenched Workers Regenerate Resistance and Transcend the Workplace: A case study of former steelworkers near Johannesburg

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute to our understanding of the organizational response of retrenched workers in a context of work reorganization by examining a group of retrenched workers at a steel plant, 70 kilometres south of Johannesburg, who were able to 'regenerate' resistance beyond the workplace and full-time employment. Dissatisfied with their union NUMSA, once retrenched, workers formed the Working Class Co-ordinating Committee (WCCC) in 1998 and now, more than a decade and a half later, the organization continues to be supported by retrenched workers, living at the KwaMasiza Hostel.

The foundation of the organization of retrenched workers lies in NUMSA's failure to unite all factions of its membership during a period of large scale work reorganization brought on by intense global competition. Disagreements on how to respond to this reorganization did not just end in polemics between differing factions, but resulted in the loss of lives and a weakened position of the union at the workplace. The article moves beyond a conventional approach which tends to capture the dynamics of workers in the workplace under the banner of trade unions and points out the ongoing resistance of retrenched workers in a post-workplace setting. The lessons, rituals and organizational practices learned at the workplace are transported into a new organizational form of retrenched workers, outside the political and geographic spheres of the workplace.

Introduction

South African labour studies have tended to shift from just focusing on well-known, formal trade unions and structures like the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to what is less-known but still reflects a critical fluidity and dynamism – those trade

union members who are precariously employed, atypical workers, and the many who have been retrenched (Alexander et al, 2012; Samson, 2009, Kenny, 2011).

In the context of global restructuring of work and, in some cases, the inability of the existing formal trade union structures to advance the interests of retrenched workers, the retrenched workers are able to 'regenerate' resistance even outside the workplace, i.e. they do not just go away, as some may wish, but continue to establish a presence and a voice of dissent. The Working Class Co-ordinating Committee (WCCC) was formed by workers who were dissatisfied with how NUMSA (regarded as a militant union in South Africa and abroad) mishandled work reorganization in a steel plant in Vanderbijlpark, an area in the south, near Johannesburg.

There is also international literature which has examined how retrenched workers regenerate resistance and struggle outside the workplace. This regeneration of resistance is a response to global restructuring and work reorganization which tends to lead to massive retrenchments. Like the WCCC, retrenched workers in other parts of the world are able to use organizational skills gained during their union days to advance their interests even when they have been expelled from the plants (Stephenson and Wray, 2005; Anaf, 2013). According to Cai (2005), retrenched workers in China are resilient and tend to rely on demonstrations, traffic blockades and legal processes to challenge their former employers. Their demands are related to compensation, pension funds, and health and safety issues.

The article is not just about filling a gap that exists in South African labour studies regarding organizational forms used by retrenched workers. The case of the WCCC seeks to demonstrate how the union's inability to manage differences during a period of work reorganization can lead to divisions and the formation of new organizations like the WCCC. Unlike the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) which maintains a close relationship with its organization of retirees, the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR), the WCCC's foundation lies in conflict with its members' former union, the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA), the biggest trade union in South Africa. NUMSA is a significant player in South African politics and industrial relations. In 2014, NUMSA membership was made up of more than 330,000 metal and allied workers, making it the biggest union in

South Africa. Formed in 1987, it was affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) but was expelled from that trade union federation because of its criticism of the governing African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. On an international scale, NUMSA is affiliated to the IndustriALL Global Union, an international union of metal, mining and manufacturing workers, with headquarters in Geneva (Hlatshwayo, 2014a).

In addition, the article will reveal how the WCCC is able to advance its interests and struggles outside the workplace and forge alliances with other organizations of retrenched workers and working class communities. The ‘regeneration’ of resistance and the foundation of new organizational forms such as the WCCC indicate that the working class is constantly in search of organizational forms and approaches which will help challenge the power of former employers and the state in a context of global restructuring.

Methodology

The article is based primarily on qualitative research and fieldwork, conducted between 2002 and 2014 in the Vanderbijlpark Steel plant and the nearby KwaMasiza Hostel, where most WCCC members live, in order to obtain in-depth workers’ life histories. We asked them about their responses to apartheid and workplace reorganization; we received individual interpretations of intra-union rivalry, an important factor after the introduction of new forms of work reorganization in 1989; information on the operations of the WCCC, its campaigns and modes of organization among retrenched workers. All interviews were conducted by the author and workers’ names are not given in order to protect their confidentiality.

There are four forms of data collection used in this article. Firstly, 105 in-depth interviews were conducted between 2002 and 2013. Sixty four of these were with WCCC members who were also former NUMSA members. There was an attempt to ensure that among these interviewed that we also included retrenched workers, current members of NUMSA, leadership of NUMSA, leaders of the WCCC, and workers from various sections of the plant ranging from iron ore and raw materials, to production and stores of steel. Included in these interviews are 36 members and shop stewards of NUMSA, 3 former NUMSA organizers who dealt directly with the plant, and 2 representatives of ArcelorMittal SA. Secondly, 3 workshops with retrenched workers were held in 2002 (63 participants), 2003 (76

participants) and 2013 (84 participants), in the Vanderbijlpark area. Thirdly, in order to deepen our understanding of the production process, factory visits occurred where members of the WCCC used to work in 2003 and 2010. Finally, archival sources such as union records, minutes of meetings and annual reports were also used.

The plant: The former workplace of retrenched workers

The history of ArcelorMittal Vanderbijlpark Plant (herein referred to as the plant) dates back to 1928 when Iscor was established as a state steel company² (Morris & Kaplan, 1976) and started producing steel in 1943. In 1989, Iscor was listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (Hlatshwayo, 2014b).

Located in the town of Vanderbijlpark, 70 kilometres to the south of Johannesburg, the steel plant occupies close to 0.8 square kilometres, and is one of the largest in Africa. In 2012, the plant employed about 4,500 workers who are more than 50 per cent of ArcelorMittal South Africa (SA)'s employees. ArcelorMittal SA has other plants in Vereeniging, Saldhana Bay, Pretoria and Newcastle, and in 2013 ArcelorMittal SA had 7,900 employees. ArcelorMittal SA is owned by the ArcelorMittal International - a steel multinational corporation (Hlatshwayo, 2014a).

In a context of global competition and increased integration of the South African economy into the world economy, the company introduced work reorganization in a form of Omega in 1989. This Japanese-inspired work reorganization model put an emphasis on team work, problem-solving, outsourcing, waste reduction and production according to customer specifications. There were training sessions on Omega which were attended by workers. Another aspect of the strategy entailed increasing the use of technology in order to speed up the production prices of steel and increase the quality of steel. The company also made it clear that it planned to retrench workers who had less formal education and those who were close to retirement age. Labour was also viewed as being expensive by management (Hlatshwayo, 2014a).

Employee numbers at Iscor/ArcelorMittal SA (these figures include all the plants in South Africa) was reduced from 56,200 employees in 1989 to 7,900 average employees in 2012. (Hlatshwayo, 2014a). In 2014, the Vanderbijlpark plant employed 4,500 workers, and if we compare this figure to the employment in 1984 which was 24,000, it can be stated that the plant lost almost

20,000 jobs in a 30-year period (ArcelorMittal SA, 2014; Xaba, 2004).

The roots of the WCCC

The revival of Black trade unions in the early 1970s had an impact on those who were working in the Vanderbijlpark Steel Plant. These workers joined the wave of trade unions which emerged as a result of the Durban strikes. Resistance was expressed in a union form of organizing, and the dominant form of resistance became overt. In 1987 NUMSA led a strike, which is notably known as “21 days that shook Iscor”. Supported by 7,000 workers, the strike compelled Iscor [Vanderbijlpark] to reform and grant black workers access to housing and their families which was a contribution to subverting the migrant labour system (a system which did not allow women and children of migrant workers to reside in the towns and cities), the banning of an ethnic system of rule at the hostels, the installation of refrigerators, a heating system in every room and the reduction of rent by 70% (Forrest, 2005). Several leading labour academics saw NUMSA as a strong union representing black worker aspirations in response to the apartheid oppression at their workplaces and in their communities (Buhlungu, 2010; Forrest, 2011). NUMSA shop stewards who had been trained in building shop floor organizations used their skills to build community structures in the Vaal area. Specifically, NUMSA was able to build structures for the ANC and community organizations in the area in the 1990s and the KwaMasiza Hostel was one of the strongholds of the ANC in the Vaal region (Zikalala, 1992).

Although there were protests and opposition to work reorganization by NUMSA and other unions at the plant in the 1990s, NUMSA’s general response was to take part in work reorganization forums at the plant, negotiate retrenchment packages for the retrenched workers and redeployment of some workers in other sections of the plant. Also negotiated were training programs and financial packages for retrenched workers (Xaba, 2004; Hlatshwayo, 2013). In general, the union structures did not have in-depth discussions on work reorganization. Union education and research was not really geared towards building the union’s capacity to respond to work reorganization and technological changes (Hlatshwayo, 2013).

The introduction of Omega created conditions for intra-union rivalry and this led to the killings and violence (Zikalala, 1992). Speaking about the Omega-linked killings, Forrest (2005:495) states that 8 shop stewards were gunned down during this intra-union battle between May and September of 1992 in and around the hostel. Omega was a source of division that led to the killings and violence in the Vanderbijlpark plant. In March 1992 the NUMSA local in Vanderbijlpark responded by expelling the “Top Twenty” members from the union some of whom were founding members of NUMSA at Iscor. Jeffrey Ndamase’s (a NUMSA leader) house was attacked with bullets but he escaped death. NUMSA’s legal officer in the Vaal was kidnapped but later escaped. Supporters of the Ndamase group fled KwaMasiza. The “Top Twenty” refused to accept their expulsion from the union and invited a new union, South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), into the plant in October 1992. Simultaneously Inkatha forces, a political group which used Zulu “ethnicity: as a tool of mobilization, were active in the Vaal Triangle and operated from an abandoned hostel, KwaMadala, next to Iscor. This meant NUMSA leadership came under attack from both quarters, namely the “Top Twenty” and the Inkatha forces (cited in Forrest, 2005:495). A weakened NUMSA meant that it was not able to united and defend workers in the context of workplace restructuring and retrenchments.

In the early 1990s, migrant workers who stood to lose their jobs as a result of workplace restructuring and now members of the WCCC, felt that shop stewards were no longer guided by the principle of “workers’ control”, the cornerstone of Metal and Allied Workers’ Union (MAWU), later NUMSA. These workers argued that some shop stewards were no longer accountable to them (Hlatshwayo, 2003). According to Forrest (2005), workers who hated Omega and were opposed to the union’s engagement with Omega met at the KwaMasiza Hostel in April 1990. They were convinced that some of their shop stewards and NUMSA were conniving with employers to have them retrenched. In June 1990, they had another meeting, attended by 500 workers in which they demanded those shop stewards, who were seen to be collaborating with employers, be dismissed. An interim leadership was elected but in April 1991, NUMSA’s regional congress reinstated the dismissed shop stewards. The interim leadership was opposed to the reinstatement; it was then expanded and became the “Top Twenty” comprising of 20 leaders,

all opposed to NUMSA leadership. The “Top Twenty” led a group of more than 500 workers who resided at the KwaMasiza Hostel.

The “Top Twenty” became an organization representing workers opposed to Omega. It built an alliance with an ex-Robben Island prisoner, former UMkhonto Wesizwe member [the former military wing of the ANC] and an ANC veteran in the Vaal region - Ernest Sotsu. Having Sotsu as one of the leaders of the “Top Twenty” gave the group some political and organizational power, because of his association with the ANC – the then leading liberation movement in South Africa. There was a battle between two factions of workers and both supported the ANC. In 1992, the centre of violent and bloody conflict was Sebokeng and the KwaMasiza hostel which were near each other, and both housed about 8,000 Iscor workers. Ernest Sotsu’s wife and two children were gunned down at his house in the Sebokeng Township while he was attending an ANC conference in Durban in 1992 and he had to move to Sebokeng hostel (Zikalala, 1992).

In an assessment of the union’s response to work reorganization and Omega, the retrenched workers expressed the view that the union was unable to deal with production issues. A former NUMSA member and a WCCC member from Tsolo in the Eastern Cape, who started working at the plant in 1970, stated that Omega was their biggest problem at that time. He further stated that NUMSA was not able to mount a defence of older migrant workers who had built NUMSA during the apartheid period. The union did not take into account that older workers with no, or less formal education, were going to be victims of Omega which put an emphasis on formal education and the ability to solve problems in the production process at the plant (Author Interview with Anonymous Worker 1, 2010). A group of WCCC members who participated in a 2013 workshop on the role of the WCCC in organizing retrenched workers felt that NUMSA’s national and regional leaders was able to unite warring factions, but had supported a faction that was pro-Omega (Hukwe, 2013).

The results of Omega were a hindrance for NUMSA which was the voice of the majority of black workers at the plant. Shop stewards and NUMSA organizers during that Omega period accepted the fact that the union was not “prepared” for Omega and the internal crisis it caused (Hlatshwayo, 2014). In the early 1990s, NUMSA membership at the plant dropped from 6,000 to 1,005, and

this decline was attributed to divisions caused by Omega (Forrest, 2005).

The retrenched workers who were part of the “Top Twenty” had to respond to massive retrenchments in the mid-1990s. They had been involved in the Omega struggle as workers at the Vanderbijlpark Plant and later found themselves outside the plant but still residing at the KwaMasiza Hostel. They had to form an organization which was supposed to champion their struggle. The retrenched workers had grievances against their former employer - Iscor. They argued that they were not being properly compensated during the retrenchment process, and many suffered from occupational diseases. They needed compensation from the former employer, and they had a view that NUMSA was unable to defend them in the struggle against retrenchments (Hlatshwayo, 2005).

A member of the WCCC and former member of NUMSA stated that many workers were retrenched in 1996 and this according to him confirmed the fears they had about Omega and work reorganization in general. He further indicated that older workers who had worked for the plant way back in the 1960s and the 1970s, who were also generally suffering from occupational diseases and had less or no formal education, were compelled to take early retirement by the company in 1996. He also stated that NUMSA was not able to help them as it had agreed to this reorganization (Anonymous 3, 2003, interview).

In 1998, during the retrenchments at the Vanderbijlpark Plant, the Socialist Party of Azania (SOPA) emerged from a breakaway with the Azanian People’s Organization (AZAPO) associated with the late Steve Biko, a leader of the civil rights movement in South Africa, and was launched in the Free State Province. SOPA’s political orientation was to the black working class located in the townships and the workplace. Phineas Malapela, a founding leader of the WCCC and a leader of SOPA in the Vaal region, stated that retrenched workers were having regular meetings at the KwaMasiza hostel and many of them were hoping that they would be reemployed by Iscor. After discussions about a need to form a vehicle which was to lead their campaign for compensation for those suffering from occupational diseases and a need for fair retrenchment packages, these ex-workers formed the WCCC in 1998 (Malapela, 2003).

The WCCC was then launched in a mass meeting attended by more than 1,000 workers at the KwaMasiza Hostel. The

members of the organization also commanded support among about 6,000 supporters largely living in the hostel. The organization was founded on the principles of internal democracy and membership participation. Decisions were to be taken in weekly meetings and the leadership elected at the launch was obliged to report back on mandates to the membership. Members of the WCCC were those who became the main targets of retrenchments. They were largely migrant workers recruited from the former Bantustans - the so called self-governing areas that separated Blacks according to “ethnic” groups. The migrant labour system separated black men from their families who had to be left behind in the Bantustans including men working in faraway places like Johannesburg. They were paid lower wages and did mostly dangerous manual work in the plant. Compared to their white counterparts, they had lower wages and poorer living conditions as they lived in overcrowded hostels. A member of the WCCC who did manual work at the plant spoke about racism and the despotic nature of work which entailed white bosses collaborating with some black assistants in forcing the black workers to increase the pace of work and steel production under very dangerous conditions. He also indicated that black workers resisted this racial despotism even under intense repression during apartheid by reducing the pace of work, violent confrontation with the white bosses and later in the 1980s, the formation of Black trade unions (Author Interview with Anonymous Worker 2, 2003). One of the objectives of the organization was to campaign for the rights of the retrenched workers and its demands included compensation by the former employer – Iscor (Hlatshwayo, 2005).

Structures and the functioning of the WCCC

The organizational structures of the WCCC have some similarities with formal unions, since they operate on the basis of elected leaders and specific mandates. However, the WCCC tends to be less formal in the sense that there are no established and rigid hierarchies, nor do they have education and research structures. This flexibility and the geographic confines of the WCCC model of organizing enable the organization to hold leaders accountable by conducting regular meetings where leaders report-back to the general membership on tasks performed (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 3, 2012).

The WCCC is managed by an elected committee that is held accountable by members at their meetings, held every Wednesday and Sunday at the KwaMasiza Hostel. The leadership follows up on court cases involving workers' financial claims against the company, attends meetings of allied organizations, and mobilizes support and solidarity for campaigns of the WCCC (Hlatshwayo, 2005). This organizational structure strives for greater democracy and membership control and seeks to regenerate the old MAWU and NUMSA culture of accountability and workers' control. According to one young interviewee, an active member of the WCCC whose father also worked at the plant, the WCCC has about 1,500 members who actively participate in the activities such as mass meetings, protest actions and demonstrations. The organization is sustained by collecting donations during meetings. This money is used to attend meetings in other areas and campaigns. The membership of the organization is now largely comprised of older former workers who are now receiving government old age pension (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 4, 2012).

Membership of the WCCC is not highly formalized with stipulated dues and membership lists. While the WCCC has a constitution, membership is loosely based on participation in meetings and protest action, those that are retrenched or related to someone that was retrenched (Hlatshwayo, 2005). Membership and meetings of the WCCC are dominated by men, as a result of the historical nature of steel work nationally and globally. Young women whose parents were workers at the plant do attend meetings and can participate but in general these meetings and proceedings are male dominated (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 4, 2012). Daughters of former workers join the campaigns and do what some consider "traditional" women's work such as the writing of minutes and keeping records of the organization (VÉJA, 2012). Granddaughters of former Iscor workers also attend some of these meetings. For example, a young woman interviewee stated that her grandmother worked at Iscor as a tea-girl and was retrenched in 1992. She was asked by her grandmother to attend the meeting on her behalf. She also indicated that she supports her grandmother and the WCCC because they were never fully compensated by Iscor. She has been attending these meetings since. She stated that the WCCC is an important organization as it helps retrenched workers

to understand their rights. (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 4, 2013).

Challenging the workplace from the outside

The WCCC organized retrenched Iscor workers and demanded compensation for occupational diseases, unfair dismissals, and retrenchments. The WCCC's objective was to struggle for compensation for former workers and for the provision of social and economic rights for former workers residing at the hostel. Some of these former workers discovered that they had been retrenched because they had been suffering from occupational diseases related to their lungs and their feet. Some had worked for Iscor since the 1960s and were, of course, due for pensions but also felt that they should be compensated for their occupational diseases (Hukwe, 2013). This is particularly true for those who had worked in the coke ovens Others in the steel section stated that as a result of working near liquid steel, they experienced eyesight problems and headaches. (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 2, 2003).

Malapela who was introduced earlier in the article also spoke about the struggle against occupational diseases and argued that the WCCC approached Iscor to raise the issue of medical examination. In 2006, the organization's representatives asked why Iscor examines workers only when they join the company and not when workers are leaving the company. The WCCC then demanded that ArcelorMittal should conduct medical examination of all its ex-workers. There are still talks about medical examination of ex-workers. The company wants to talk to the WCCC, this after the WCCC exposed ArcelorMittal on Television (Hukwe, 2013).

In 2005 the WCCC supported protest action and demands of other retrenched workers in the Vaal area. Members of the Samancor Retrenched Workers' Crisis Committee (SRWCC), another formation of retrenched workers in the Vaal area, held joint protest action demanding compensation from their former employers. In 2001 the South African government passed a law which compelled pension funds to pay former members a share of pension surplus. On 31 August 2006, former Iscor workers protested at Mittal Steel offices (the name of the company was changed from Iscor to Mittal Steel in 2005) in Pretoria in support of a demand for access to the pension surplus (McKinley, 2006).

WCCC members staged a sit-in during the meeting of ArcelorMittal SA board of trustees for a pension fund in Pretoria in 2008, demanding payments from surplus funds. This resulted in trustees speeding up the payment of pension surplus funds to former Iscor workers. There were variations in the amounts of money workers received. Some received R120, 000 (about US\$ 12,000) and some got less than R100 (US\$10). Those who received less money when they left the plant, received more from the pension surplus funds. After receiving money from the funds, workers organized a celebratory function and slaughtered a beast at the KwaMasiza Hostel (Hukwe, 2013).

The hostel as a site of struggle

The former Iscor Vanderbijlpark Plant workers have lived in the flats or hostel since 1977 when they were employed in the plant (Hlatshwayo, 2005). Writing about the physical location of the retrenched workers, Loebell (2005) states two major reasons why former migrant workers continued living at the KwaMasiz Hostel. The first is that they do not have to pay rent and basic service fees, yet living conditions have been described as catastrophic, without proper sanitation and access to water, electricity and cleaning services.

The second is that the hostel is near the Vanderbijlpark plant which gives them easy access to the plant for purposes of protests and demonstrations (Loebell, 2005) and the workers see them as being in a strategic geographic location in their struggle against the company and the state. Loebell (2005) discusses this issue, and argues that Ernest Sigaqana and some others feel that they have more leverage to fight for the money owed to them by the company as long as they stay at KwaMasiza. Therefore the hostel is not just a physical space, but it can be conceptualized as a “military” base, bringing together the retrenched workers in one geographic space of resistance. Therefore removing these ex-workers from the hostel may mean weakening or even undermining their resistance. The hostel is a point of mobilization as it enables these former workers to meet and plan their campaign without having to travel long distances. Thus, the hostel plays a critical role in sustaining the WCCC.

On 11 September 2002, the KwaMasiza residents were forcefully removed by *Wozani*, a private security company which was hired by the ANC-led municipality to evict residents. About

6,000 hostel dwellers were evicted when the hostel was sold by Iscor. It was reported that a local ANC councilor had purchased the hostel (Malapela, 2002:1). No longer seeing the ANC serving their interests, on the 12 of September 2002, residents of KwaMasiza under the leadership of the WCCC, decided to reoccupy the flats. They removed the barbed wire fence and flats were occupied by members of the WCCC (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 5, 2005). In 2008, the Emfuleni Municipality reconnected the water supply to the Kwa-Masiza Hostel after six years without water (Veriava, 2008).

Hostel conditions continued to be unbearable. In 2013, there was still no clean running water, sanitation facilities or electricity (Shangase, 2007; Hukwe, 2013). This led to some members of the WCCC leaving for accommodations in nearby places in Sebokeng Township, a black residential area in the south of Johannesburg. Some of the members of the WCCC have died in the interim and some have left for the Eastern Cape. However, those who have left the hostel and reside in nearby areas continue to be active in meetings and still own rooms in the hostel. There are about 300 members of the WCCC who still cling to their rooms at the hostel. As of 2013, renovations were spearheaded by the municipality, but WCCC members speculate that the municipality wants to evict them so that the renovated hostel can be occupied by more affluent people (Hukwe, 2013).

A leading member of WCCC, who worked for Iscor from the 1970s until his retrenchment in the 1990s, argued that the municipality wants to dump former workers in Steel Valley, an abandoned area that had been polluted by Iscor. He further indicated that the municipality is promising former workers state housing which he claims is of poor quality while trying to divide former workers and WCCC members. These in turn argue that the KwaMasiza hostel belongs to them as former workers (Author Interview, Anonymous worker 6, 2013).

Building alliances

The retrenched workers, as part of WCCC became affiliated to the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF) at its formation in 2000. Based in Gauteng province, the APF is an umbrella organization composed of community organizations that provide political and logistical support to working class communities struggling

over access to water, electricity and the rights of former workers. However, the last Annual General Meeting of the APF was held in 2010. The organization was dissolved, because of internal differences (McKinley, 2012).

These retrenched workers are also part of various networks of social and environmental justice organizations in the Vaal area near Johannesburg. The WCCC has also used the expertise and skills of other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and experts in the area to advance their cause. The Vaal Environmental Justice Association (VEJA), a network of community environmental organizations and workers, has also championed the demands and issues of the WCCC in public meetings and through electronic media (Hukwe, 2013). A VEJA representative noted that ArcelorMittal continues to violate the labour and environmental rights of former workers and communities in the Vaal area. The media campaign waged by the WCCC and NGOs has compelled ArcelorMittal to want to talk to former workers (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 7, 2013).

In 2011, young people of the hostel who are also members of the WCCC initiated a reading and literacy club for children living in the hostel. A team of young volunteers helps children with homework and school work as most parents have lower literacy levels. Bongani Mute's (a young leader of the WCCC) work on literacy is supported by the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg. One of the demands of the literacy group is that the work of facilitators be paid by the state (Nali'bali, 2012). CERT also offers non-formal adult education programmes that include workshops on organization-building and campaign organizing to WCCC members (Hukwe, 2013).

Challenges of 'regeneration'

One of the critical questions facing the WCCC and its members is how to regenerate the struggle, the organization and its issues in the context of an ageing membership. Sustaining the organization and ensuring that it continues to champion issues of retrenched workers in the Vaal area. There has been a concerted effort to regenerate and revive the organization. Instead of just being an organization comprising former Iscor workers, the WCCC has invited other retrenched workers from the early 2000s in the Vaal

area to join. For example, the retrenched workers who worked at Cape Gate joined the WCCC last year (Hukwe, 2013).

Stephenson and Wray (2005) argue that ‘regeneration’ entails individuals and organizations going through traumatic periods like retrenchments, but they then go through a subsequent phase where they ‘regenerate’ themselves. Old and new tactics are used in a new context to continue with struggles for survival. The old traditions of struggle such as meetings, songs, marches, and pickets continue to form part of the activities of the organizations. New strategies include developing links with NGOs and use of internet and electronic media to raise national and global awareness about the demands of ex-workers. On the other hand, the WCCC continues to be part of VEJA, a network of environmental justice organizations in the Vaal area. The network demands that companies such as ArcelorMittal SA account for air pollution and environmental degradation in the Vaal area (Hukwe, 2013).

‘Regeneration’ in this context of the WCCC entails these former workers using methods of organizing learned at the workplace such as meetings, protests and marches to regenerate and re-organize themselves as retrenched workers. While the WCCC represents and attempts ‘regeneration’ by the retrenched workers, there are challenges with regard to the ‘regeneration’ of the WCCC. However, the WCCC is trying to address some of those difficult questions of sustainability.

Although the WCCC made some gains in the form of continuing with the struggle of retrenched workers, defending its membership from evictions, facilitating and ensuring that some of its members receive funds from pension surplus, its membership is ageing which raises questions of sustainability. However, some of the children of these migrant workers have also joined the organization. This is basically another form of “handing over of the baton” from the adults of the WCCC to the youth and may contribute to a degree of sustainability. The Masiza Youth and Development Organization (MYDO) is based at KwaMasiza Hostel and works closely with the WCCC. It seeks to ensure that young people at the hostel support WCCC struggles and campaigns and get involved in hostel literacy projects. Another interviewee whose father worked for Iscor spoke about a need for co-operative projects and a need to regenerate the WCCC, stating that part of ‘regenerating’ the WCCC and the struggle of former workers must be to support community engagement in

projects such as ABET [Adult Basic Education], food gardening and so on. In a context of high levels of unemployment, this may help sustain those members who are unemployed and without an income (Hukwe, 2013).

As part of regeneration and sustaining the organization, the WCCC has recruited younger members. As a way of sustaining members of the organization, there are plans to build co-operatives so that the retrenched workers can at least have some income in order to support themselves and families and continue campaigning for their rights (Hukwe, 2013).

Meanwhile, the organization has a geographic limitation in the sense that it only operates at the hostel and in the Vaal region. There was fear that the decline of the APF, which had exposed the organization to similar organizations and to the media, may result in an isolation of the WCCC. However, it has built new alliances with a newly-formed *Right2Know* Campaign, which has a national spread; and with the South African History Archives (SAHA). These have enabled the WCCC to access information which, among other topics, has allowed it to expose alleged corruption by local councilors in the sale and purchase of the hostel. The organization is calling for a full investigation into these alleged corrupt deals (SAHA, 2012).

A ‘regeneration’ of the relationship between NUMSA and the WCCC?

Other unions have developed good working relationships with their retired and retrenched members including the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) and their retired workers in the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOARS) and Germany’s *Industriegewerkschaft Metall* (IG Metall) where some retired workers continue to be union members and act as union advisors, especially in cases of workplace restructuring (Hlatshwayo, 2013). The NUMSA constitution includes an associate membership status described as: “This membership (associate membership) is available to workers with two years or more active membership [who] are no longer employed in the metal and related industries...” (NUMSA, 2009:8). However, as the WCCC still has a dispute with NUMSA dating back to the Omega days, this form of membership is not an option. In 2013 NUMSA held a special congress which took resolutions which included calling for radical economic changes in favour of the working class. These resolutions may make it possible

for NUMSA to mend its relationship with the WCCC (NUMSA, 2013).

NUMSA's resolution on the Marikana massacre represents a further radicalization of NUMSA and possibilities of strengthening other community-based formation. In its special congress in 2013, NUMSA argued: "What happened in Marikana is one of the reasons why we convened this Special National Congress. As a union we said that after the mowing down of 34 miners in Marikana, it can't be 'business as usual' in South Africa".

It then also declared: "In light of the above as NUMSA, we should call on COSATU to break from the Alliance. The time for looking for an alternative has arrived" (NUMSA, 2013:18). NUMSA also argued for a formation of an alternative platform to the ANC (NUMSA, 2013:2). The union called for the formation of a United Front which has to co-ordinate and link community and workers' struggles, because the ANC is not advancing the interest of communities and workers.

In pursuit of their interests, members of the WCCC define themselves outside of the ANC. The APF to which the WCCC was affiliated was opposed to the ANC and its policies. In 2007, the ANC-led government implemented policies which were in support of capitalists at the expense of the working class and the poor (South African Press Association, 2007). Loebell also confirms that the WCCC membership had serious problems with the ANC as indicated by its affiliation with the APF, also opposed to ANC's privatization policies. (Loebel, 2005).

However, the Marikana Massacre and policies of the ANC which have not advanced the interests of workers and the poor in general led to NUMSA adopting a position that it would not support the ANC in the 2014 national elections (NUMSA, 2013). Like NUMSA, the WCCC was enormously disturbed by the massacre. One of the interviewees reported that the WCCC supports the workers and the people of Marikana. The WCCC delegation visited Marikana after the massacre twice. They further argued that the ANC government cannot be trusted. Ramaphosa [Deputy President of the ANC] was a leader of the NUM and he was part of the conspiracy which led to the Marikana Massacre (Anonymous, Member 1, 2014, telephone interview).

The common denominator here is that both NUMSA and the WCCC are seriously opposed to the political and economic direction

taken by the ANC. Does this pose a possibility of reconciliation and collaboration between the old arch rivals – NUMSA and the WCCC? An interviewee, an organizer of the WCCC, raised the possibility of unity between NUMSA and the WCCC, but indicated that it will depend on whether NUMSA is willing to redeem itself by acknowledging past mistakes and support struggles of retrenched workers living at the hostel and other places. NUMSA visited the WCCC and asked for support of its United Front march planned for March 2014. The march's principle demand was for the state to implement policies for job creation and labour rights for young people in South Africa. Despite the feeling that NUMSA had betrayed them, members of the WCCC decided to be part of the march. They also agreed that past disagreements and NUMSA's handling of the problems resulting from the implementation of Omega would be discussed and debated with the view to unite NUMSA and the WCCC (Author Interview, Anonymous Worker 7, 2014)

Conclusion

In a context of global restructuring of work and large scale retrenchments, former workers are beginning to introduce new organizational forms for retrenched workers and retirees. In the case of the WCCC, retrenched workers with fewer resources were able to sustain their organization and continued to 'regenerate' resistance even when they were expelled from the workplace which, of course, gave them a political and geographic advantage compared to other workers who live in various sections of towns. The article has shown that the retrenched workers, members of the WCCC, who entered the workplace during the apartheid years in the 1960s and who were retrenched in the 1990s, at the dawn of democracy, have been able to 'regenerate' resistance even when located outside the workplace. This regeneration contributes to strengthening and making resistance possible among retrenched workers.

The current struggle of the WCCC, whose base is the hostel, confronts two opponents, namely the ArcelorMittal Plant and the ANC government. The WCCC as an organization has defined itself as an opposition to the ANC which has been unable to defend and advance the interests of WCCC members. NUMSA's recent position which sees the ANC as a party that serves the interest of the rich and powerful raises possibilities for its reconciliation with the WCCC which had felt betrayed by NUMSA during the period of work

reorganization resulting in large scale retrenchments of WCCC members (Anonymous, Member1, 2014, telephonic interview). Perhaps reconciliation will strengthen the process of ‘regeneration’ of the WCCC, but the organization knows that it has to rely on its own membership to advance retrenched workers’ interests.

Endnotes

1. University of Johannesburg, Centre for Education Rights and Transformation, mondlih@gmail.com
2. Note that Iscor South Africa became ArcelorMittal South Africa in 2007. This was after Iscor South African had been taken over by ArcelorMittal International. ArcelorMittal South Africa has operations in Vanderbijlpark, Newcastle, Pretoria and Saldanha.

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